

NAVAL TORPEDO STATION
(Naval Undersea Warfare Center)
Coddington Cove and Gould Island,
U.S. Naval Reservation
Newport
Newport County
Rhode Island

HAER No. RI-38

HAER
RI
3-NEWP,
81-

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD
National Park Service
Northeast Region
U.S. Custom House
200 Chestnut Street
Philadelphia, PA 19106

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NAVAL TORPEDO STATION
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LOCATION:

Coddington Cove and Gould Island, U.S. Naval Reservation,
Newport, Newport County, Rhode Island

U.S.G.S. Prudence Island, R.I. Quadrangle, 1:24,000.
UTM: 19.304270.4601100

DATE OF
CONSTRUCTION:

1942-43

PRESENT OWNER:

United States Department of the Navy, Naval Undersea Warfare
Center, Division Newport, Rhode Island

PRESENT USE:

Naval research and development facility

SIGNIFICANCE:

The present-day Naval Undersea Warfare Center was built during World War II during expansion of the Naval Torpedo Station at Newport, Rhode Island, which from its establishment in 1869 until this war was the Navy's sole facility for development and production of torpedoes. From its inception, the complex at Coddington Cove and Gould Island was devoted primarily to research, development and testing, with over 75,000 torpedoes tested in its laboratories and on its underwater ranges by war's end in 1946. Renamed several times during periodic reorganizations since 1951, the Naval Undersea Warfare Center continues to play an important part in the development and maintenance of sophisticated underwater warfare systems for the Navy.

PROJECT
INFORMATION:

The firing pier was recorded under provisions of a Memorandum of Agreement between the Rhode Island State Historic Preservation Office and Northern Division, Naval Facilities Engineering Command, Philadelphia. Portions of the firing pier are scheduled for removal as part of a pollution abatement program. This documentation was prepared by the Cultural Resource Group of Louis Berger & Associates, Inc., East Orange, New Jersey. Project personnel included Martha H. Bowers, Senior Architectural Historian; and Rob Tucher, Senior Photographer.

The present-day Naval Undersea Warfare Center might most simply be described as the current incarnation of the Naval Torpedo Station established at Newport, Rhode Island, in 1869. The Naval Undersea Warfare Center is situated on Coddington Cove on the eastern side of Narragansett Bay. About 1.5 mile offshore lies Gould Island, acquired in its entirety by the Navy in 1918; today, only the north end of the island remains under Navy jurisdiction.

The Coddington Cove area was originally developed in 1942 as an annex to the Navy's Torpedo Station on Goat Island off Newport. By November of that year, however, the Central Torpedo Office was relocated to the new facility from Goat Island. In the decades following the war, the Coddington Cove facility experienced several reorganizations, finally emerging in 1970 as part of the Naval Underwater Systems Center. The legacy of the facility's evolution over the past 50 years is clearly evidenced in the existing built environment, which includes a sizeable number of World War II-era buildings along with a nearly equal number of buildings and structures erected since 1950. Of buildings and structures presently on the facility, 35 were constructed between 1942 and 1945, nine during the 1950s, four during the 1960s, 13 during the 1970s, and 14 during the 1980s. In contrast, Gould Island is almost entirely abandoned, with roadway fragments and assorted building remains scattered among heavy vegetation that has grown up over the past several decades.

The U.S. Navy's presence in the Newport area extends back to 1863, when the Naval Academy, then as now based at Annapolis, Maryland, was temporarily relocated to this Rhode Island city during the Civil War. The first permanent Navy occupation of land at Newport occurred in 1869, when Goat Island, containing the coastal fortification called Fort Walcott, was transferred from the Army to serve as the first home for a Naval Torpedo Station (Hale, n.d.: 79). In 1883, the Navy expanded its activities at Newport with the establishment of its first on-shore recruit training facility, subsequently known as the Naval Training Station, on Coasters Harbor Island, and the Naval War College was opened there the following year. By 1900, Melville Basin, off Portsmouth, had been developed as a coaling station for the Navy's new steam-powered ships. The Newport Naval Hospital was established at what was then called Government Landing in Newport in 1913 (Olsen 1980: 72; Schroder 1980: 73).

In its early decades, the Naval Torpedo Station on Goat Island functioned as the Navy's laboratory for research on and testing of "stationary torpedoes," e.g. moored mines, and boom-mounted contact explosive charges called spar torpedoes. Gradually, it moved into work on "automobile torpedoes," focusing on experiments with existing types to improve propulsion and guidance systems. In 1907, facilities for the manufacture of explosive main charges were relocated to Indian Head, Maryland, and the Navy began construction of a plant for the manufacture of torpedoes on Goat Island (Kennedy 1983: 8-11).

During World War I, the Naval Torpedo Station employed some 3200 civilians to facilitate production of depth charges, mines and torpedoes. In 1918, the Navy acquired Gould Island, initially for use as a storage facility for high explosives. By 1920, the island contained several

buildings to house torpedoes and warheads, a water supply system, concrete dock, and a cottage "converted to use as a barracks" by a detachment of Marines. In 1921, activities on Gould Island were expanded with construction of hydroplane and kite balloon hangars for aircraft assigned to the island to participate in experiments on launching torpedoes from the air (Schroder 1980: 77; Coggeshall and McCarthy 1920: 33).

Prior to World War II, the Navy occupied fewer than 500 acres in the Newport area. By the 1970s, the Navy controlled over 30 miles of shoreline and over 6000 acres of shorefront property around Narragansett Bay, nearly all of which was acquired during an enormous wartime expansion program (Olsen 1980: 72). South Prudence and Hope islands were acquired for use as ammunition storage depots, and a naval air station was established at Quonset Point, also serving as homeport for the carriers Wasp and Intrepid. The Navy's Davisville facility was constructed in 1942, primarily to accommodate expansion from Quonset Point (Olsen 1980: 72). The Naval Torpedo Station at Newport became the single largest manufacturing operation in Rhode Island, employing some 13,000 people on a 24-hour-a-day, seven-day-a week schedule (Olsen 1980: 72; Schroder 1980: 80). The great majority of these workers were civilians, many drawn from Fall River and New Bedford, Massachusetts, as well as Providence and "points even farther to the west and north" (Naval Torpedo Station, NP-1: Letter, Inspector of Ordnance in Charge to Commandant, First Naval District, 6 November 1941).

Beginning in 1942, the facilities of the Naval Torpedo station were expanded through a large-scale construction program at Coddington Cove and on adjacent Gould Island. The new Torpedo Station Annex at Coddington Cove opened in October of that year, and the following month became headquarters for the Navy's Central Torpedo Office. In a general reorganization of the Naval Torpedo Station, Goat Island became chiefly the manufacturing center. Research and development, storage and shipping, as well as administration, were based at Coddington Cove, while Gould Island became the center for testing and range proofing. For the latter, facilities for the overhaul and proof-firing of torpedoes were constructed at the north end of the island, consisting of a huge shop with its own power plant, and a specially-built firing pier (NUSC 1984: 8; Anonymous, n.d.).

Almost immediately after the war ended, the Navy terminated torpedo manufacture at Goat Island. In 1951, the Naval Torpedo Station was reorganized as the Naval Underwater Ordnance Station (NUOS); the Goat Island production facilities were closed, and the new activity's operations fully assigned to the former annex at Coddington Cove. NUIS's basic mission was threefold: research and development; storage and issue; and ranging and proofing (NUSC 1984: 9; "NUSC on Torpedoes" 1988: 21). In 1966, NUIS was incorporated into the Naval Underwater Weapons Station (NUWS), which in turn became part of the Naval Underwater Systems Centers (NUSC) as a result of merger with the Underwater Sound Laboratory at New London, Connecticut, in 1970. Major construction campaigns during this period resulted in the appearance of many new buildings at Coddington Cove as well as the upgrading of existing facilities to accommodate expanding and evolving missions (Boston Affiliates 1984: 10-11).

Goat Island, however, was sold, and its buildings demolished during redevelopment. The Navy effectively abandoned most of Gould Island during the extensive cutbacks of 1972-73, retaining only the firing pier (Building 35) in intermittent use. Also during this period, the Navy transferred the central portion of Gould Island to the Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management. The southern portion was transferred to DEM in the mid-1980s. As a result of the Base Closure and Realignment Act of 1991, NUSC became the Naval Undersea Warfare Center, Division Newport.

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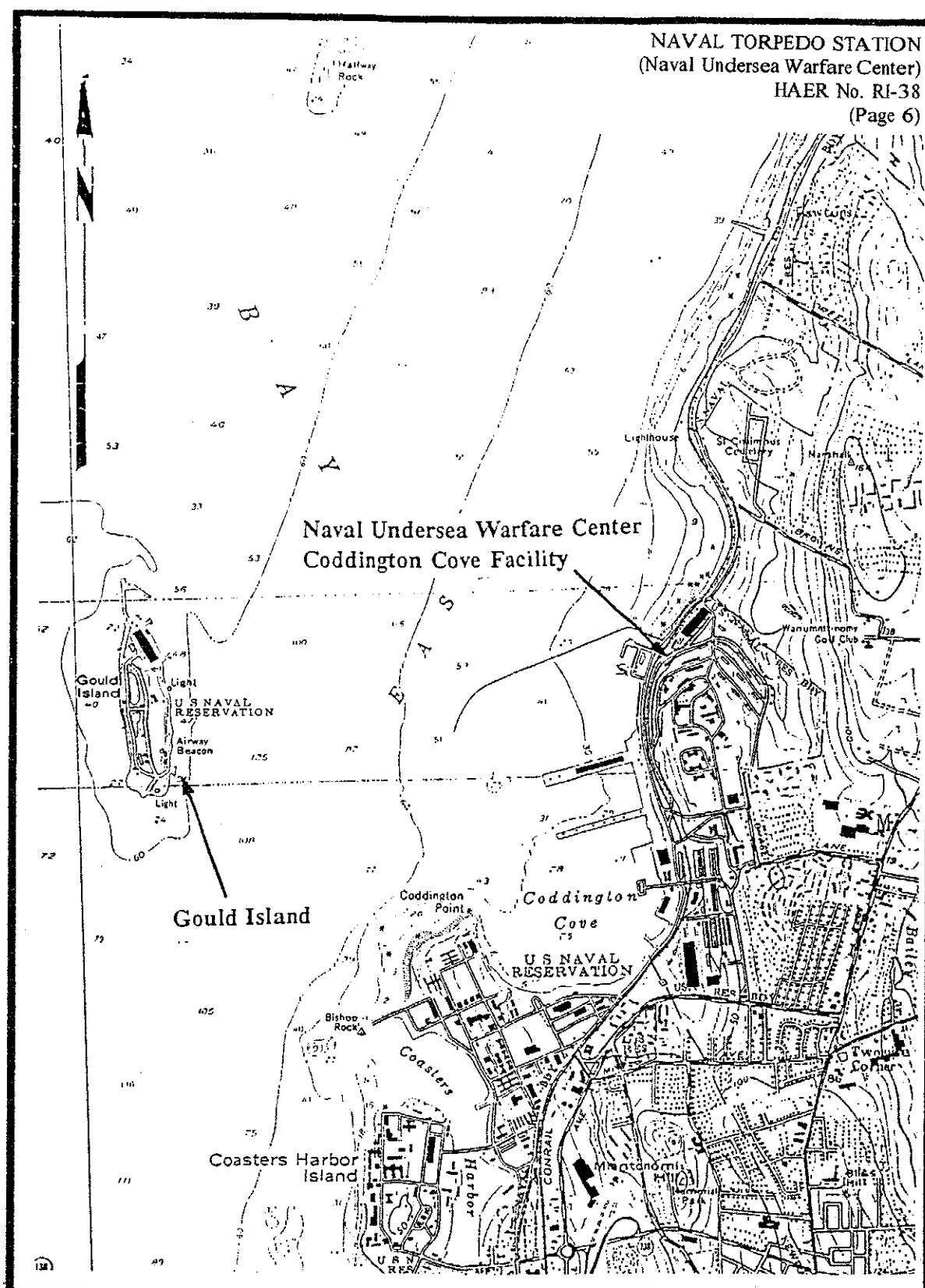
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Rhode Island Historical Preservation Commission

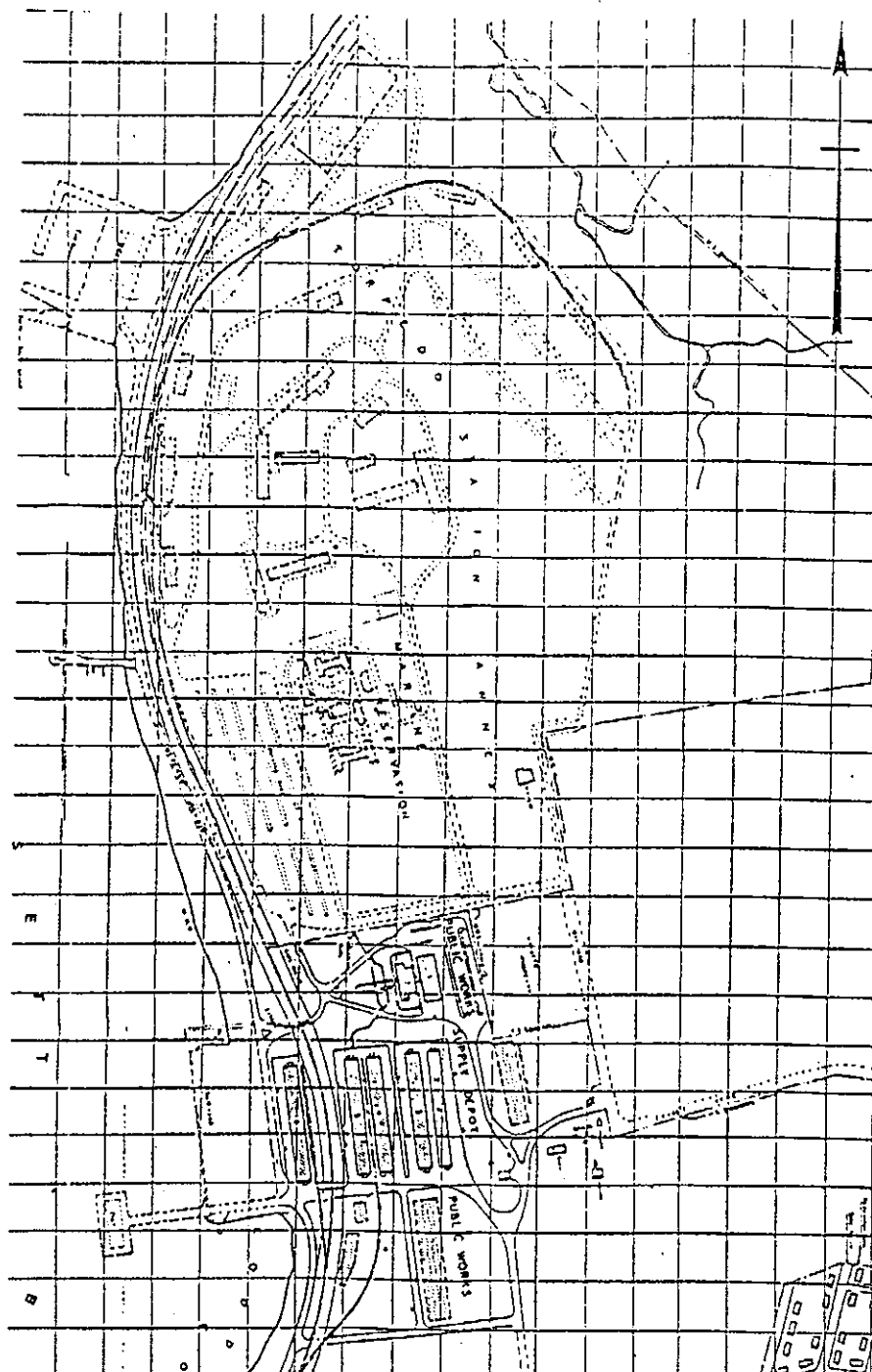
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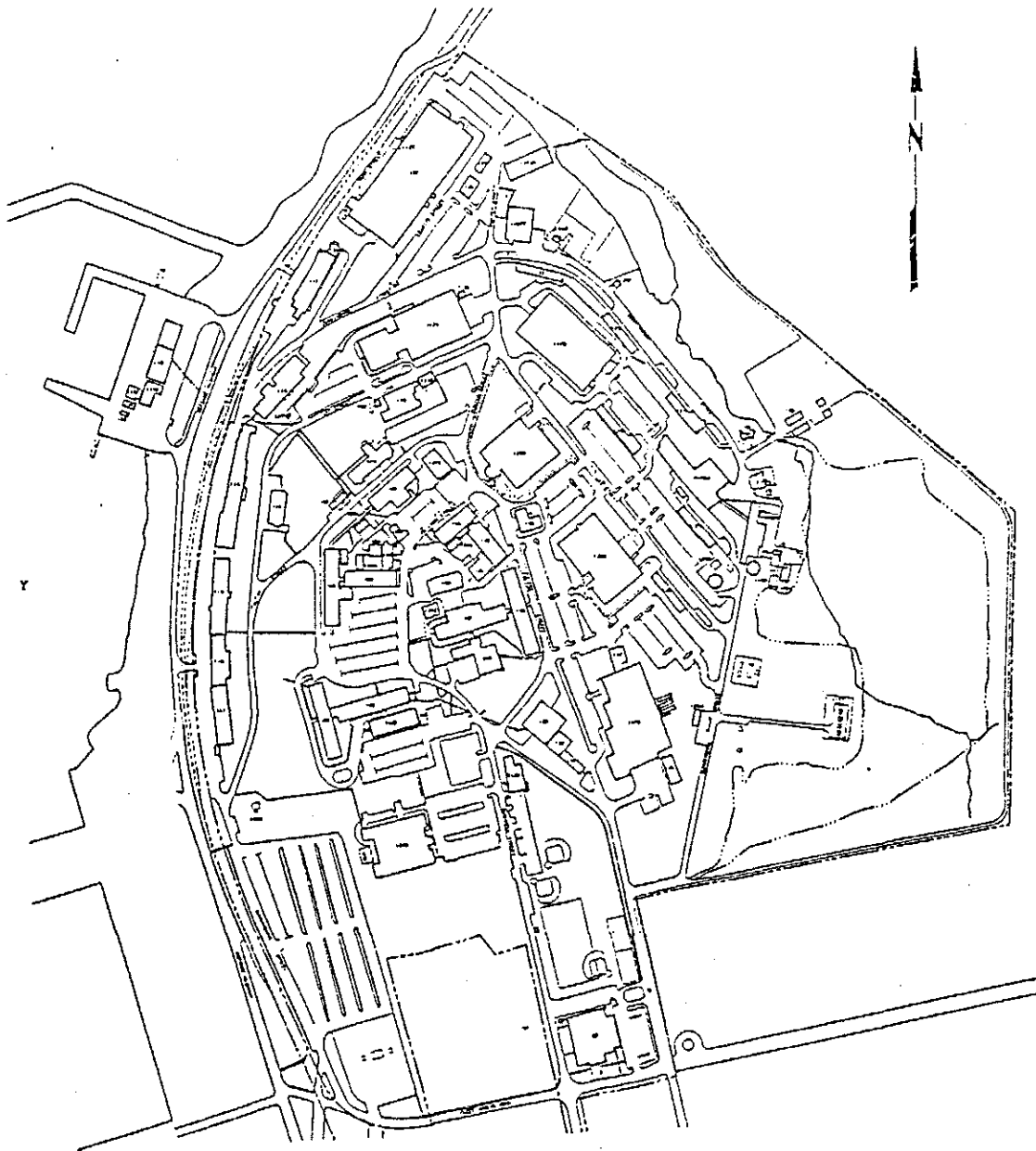
Naval Torpedo Station Annex at Coddington Cove, 1942

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Naval Torpedo Station at Coddington Cove, 1951

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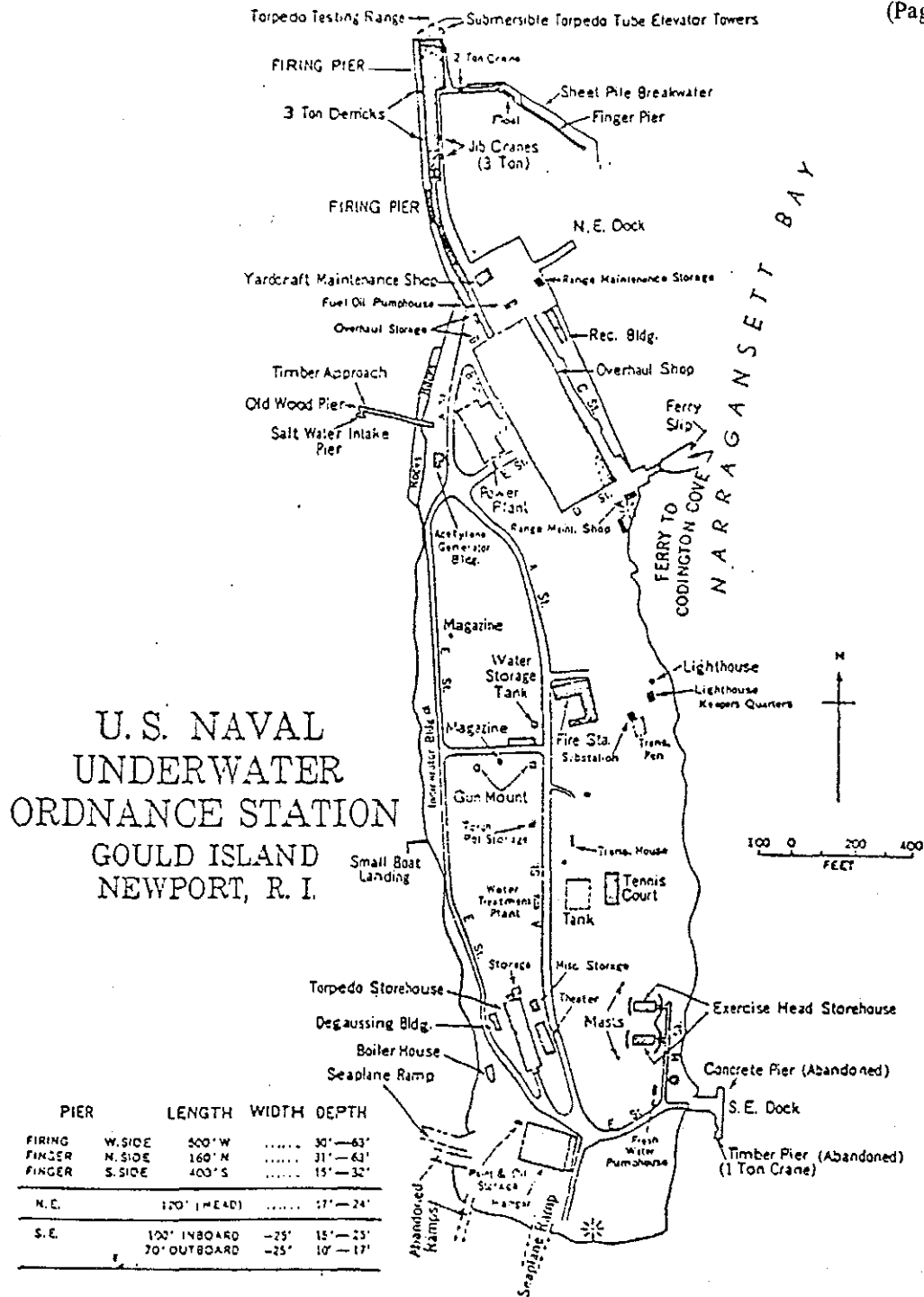


Naval Undersea Warfare Center at Coddington Cove, 1993

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Gould Island, undated plan [1951-1966]